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VII.

RECENT ESSAYS.

1. Hayward's Selected Essays.
2. Arnold's Mixed Essays.
3. Gladstone's Gleanings of Past Years.
4. Burroughs's Locusts and Wild Honey.
5. Wild Life in a Southern County.

FAMILY likenesses, it is said, are always best seen by casual visitors, while the members of the household are apt to think that no two of their number look alike. It is thus that an American reader sometimes observes a certain generic quality in a group of English essayists, who would seem to themselves widely separated. Mr. Hayward, Mr. Gladstone, and Mr. Matthew Arnold would appear to have little in common, yet they all possess that clear and vigorous directness that marks the current prose of English writers. Not one of them has anything of the half-ideal aim, the love of delicate word-painting, the instinct of symmetry, which are the imprint left by Emerson and Hawthorne on the best cis-Atlantic literature; and which sometimes appear as a tendency or desire, even if no adequate result follows. An acute English writer, Lady Pollock, pointing out some such distinction several years ago, classed American prose writers with the French school rather than with the English, and declared that "the symmetry of our language might run the risk of annihilation but for the reverence with which American men of letters cherish it."* In England, one observes, a man has something to say and says it, speaking right on, and never for a moment placing himself in any attitude for which the habits or methods of the artist's studio would yield a parallel. Can good literature demand more than this? Mr. Herbert Spencer would say "No." The traditions of literary art say "Yes." Happily, the question need not here be settled; it is not needful to discuss or compare these two literary phases; the point of interest is in noticing that the Atlantic Ocean seems just now to divide them. It

* Contemporary Review, xxii., 371, "Imaginative Literature of America."

is only fair to say that the best English essayists are, if tried by their own standard, better than the American ; and that their disadvantage is found, if anywhere, only upon the introduction of other tests, which they would perhaps think frivolous and unimportant.

I.

Of the collection of essays now to be considered, there is no doubt that Mr. Arnold's will be the most widely valued for thought and style, Mr. Gladstone's for range and historic interest, and Mr. Hayward's* for easy and agreeable reading. The latter touches nothing which he does not make attractive ; he never taxes the brain severely ; his longest articles have an agreeable conversational tone that never wearies. He is like one of those incomparable London diners-out compared with whom brilliant American talkers are apt to seem tedious and monopolizing, and cultivated Frenchmen too excitable and over-vehement : the London men who make no startling display, obtrude nothing, never dazzle, but insensibly get all the wit and wisdom of the table into their hands ; they quietly drop out an anecdote, furnish precisely the needed repartee, and trump with absolute conclusiveness the best conversational card of their neighbor. Mr. Hayward, having his readers at his command, is less fragmentary than these trained conversers, and indeed it is he who furnishes in one of his most delightful essays, "England and France : their National Qualities, Manners, Morals, and Society," a protest against this very type. He says that the fault of English conversation at present is its frivolity, and its habit of skipping hastily from topic to topic ; the fear that haunts all men of being bores if they venture beyond a short anecdote or a *bon mot*. "Lord Grenville used to say that he was always glad to meet lawyers at a dinner-party, because he then felt that some good subject would be rationally discussed" (ii., 329).

Mr. Hayward's subjects range through all modern history and biography, winding up with an elaborate paper on "Whist and Whist-Playing," so that it is hard to select among his themes. A staunch lover of traditions and old families, he yet reduces extremely low the claims of all actual European aristocracies ; shows (ii., 187) the enormous proportion of great intellectual names of England that are now extinct as to male descent ; dwells with grim sternness on the base origin of most of the Norman conquerors (ii., 210) ;

* Selected Essays, by A. Hayward, Esq., Q. C. In Two Volumes. New York : Scribner & Welford, 1879.

quotes Lord Beaconsfield to establish the modern origin of the English peerage (ii., 238); and through his whole chapter on "The Vicissitudes of Families" (ii., 184) really maintains a practical protest against the pride of birth. He says in this essay that "pedigree hunting" has become quite a mania in the United States (ii., 185), and evidently is not aware that it has long been prosecuted far more laboriously on this side the ocean than the other. This is mainly because American pedigrees are constructed in the spirit of cousinship, pure and simple, covering a vast range and including with eagerness all remote and collateral branches; while an English pedigree makes little of younger sons and of all daughters, cuts them off, so to speak, with a shilling's worth of genealogical tracing, and leaves the most prolific branches with a vague "had issue" at last. Mr. Hayward does not know how much more laborious, in these respects, are the paths of the American genealogist, nor does he know how convenient for us will be his theory that five or six centuries of ancestry are enough to set up any family, and that less may suffice where its name has occurred frequently, with distinction, in its country's annals (ii., 213). Mr. Astor, with his comforting assurance that a man with half a million was as well off as if he were rich, was not more consoling to the lovers of money than is Mr. Hayward to the pride of American genealogy. The descendants of our older Puritan, Knickerbocker, and Cavalier families may well take courage; they are already in the third century of their existence, and two or three centuries more will quite set them up as an aristocracy, if the world holds for that time to Mr. Hayward's way of thinking. In all seriousness, however, the republican point of criticism on this theory would probably be that where a family is thus really eminent a title of nobility is superfluous, and that in all other cases it is an abuse. The advantage of the republican method seems to be that it gives full weight to the accumulated influence of any really able and useful family; and easily rids itself—which an aristocracy does not—of the bad influence of any family that turns out ill.

Mr. Hayward is gratefully known to many Americans as the author of that prose version of "Faust" which still holds its own against all rivals in prose or verse. He is known to others as the friend of Charles Sumner, and as the writer of generous praise of him in the "Quarterly Review," so long ago as 1840. And he may well be known, henceforward, to all youths ambitious of conversational fame, as the author of these two volumes of prose essays,

which will, if duly read and remembered, supply such aspirants with *mots* and anecdotes enough to last a lifetime ; answering, indeed, the purpose of that manual of French wit, the “*Improvvisatore Français*” whose twenty-one volumes are said to have been ex-Bishop Talleyrand’s only breviary, and the true foundation of his fame as a wit (Hayward, ii., 156).

II.

American readers of Mr. Matthew Arnold’s new volume of “*Mixed Essays*”* will be likely to turn first to the celebrated lecture on “*Equality*,” in which he touches some of the political and social matters most important to ourselves. It is inevitable that, taking this address for their point of departure, such readers should feel some disappointment as they read the book. They will find the author speaking with some enthusiasm of liberty, and with much respect for the desire of social equality, which he justifies as a natural form of what he calls “the instinct of expansion.” He vindicates this emotion, indeed, before “all Israel and the sun”—all England and the Royal Institution. But if the breadth of his thought on this point encourages, the narrow range of his illustrations will be, at least to this class of readers, a disappointment. He wishes to compare the social phenomena resulting from this instinct of equality and from the opposing creed. For this purpose he compares England with France—two nations so thoroughly alien in respect of race, religion, speech, manners, food, climate, that the difference lies not in one point only, but in a thousand. In scientific experiments, where analogous phenomena are to be compared, they are usually so chosen as to eliminate all but the one point of difference selected for investigation. This is impossible in comparing Frenchmen and Englishmen, because they differ at almost all points, and it is scarcely practicable to fix the source of any especial divergence ; but take forty million English-speaking people under a republic on one side the Atlantic, and another forty million on the other side, under an aristocracy, and the elements of comparison grow far more simple. For instance, Mr. Arnold finds it an important result of the desire for equality in France, that “the whole immense middle class in France makes upon life the demands which are, elsewhere, those of a limited upper class only” (p. 167). Now, so long as this is asserted of France alone, nothing is proved as to equality ; that may seem, to one observer, the key to this state of things ; another

* *Mixed Essays*. By Matthew Arnold. London and New York: Macmillan & Co.

may find the explanation in race or religion. But, when we observe that precisely this formula describes American society as well, the weight of the argument is enormously strengthened ; because so many of the disturbing elements of race, religion, and tradition are here eliminated from the comparison. This is what I mean by suggesting a certain narrowness of range in Mr. Arnold's basis of argument. No man in England says things that seem nearer to an American point of view, and no man in England seems more absolutely indifferent to results obtained in America. Whenever he speaks of them, it is to take the thing he most hates—the "hideousness and *ennui*" which stamp, as he claims, all middle-class Dissent in England—and to assume, without offering a fact to sustain it, that all American society simply reproduces the type he paints as so odious. What else can he mean when he speaks, for instance, of "the eternal solo of Philistinism among our brethren of the United States and of Canada"? (p. 344).

Now, it is very certain that all Americans are not to be classed among those whom Dr. Holmes describes in one of his poems as "cheerful Christians of the liberal fold." But it also happens to be sure, as a matter of fact, that the "prison of Puritanism," as Mr. Arnold loves to call it (pp. 78, 227), has been so utterly remodeled and transformed on this continent during the last half century, by the vast intermingling of all races and religions, that there is scarcely enough of it left unmodified in the strictest communities to exert more than its needed share of influence on American life. Canada must answer for itself ; but there is hardly a corner, even of New England, that now spends its winters in the gloomy manner in which Mr. Arnold fancies Mr. Goldwin Smith as spending them in Toronto (p. 83). What has modern Boston, with its Sunday concerts and Sunday excursions—with its libraries and reading-rooms and art-galleries, all open on Sunday—to do with that dungeon of Puritanism held up by Mr. Arnold to the horror of mankind ?

And there is danger for Mr. Arnold, as for his readers, in the habit of over-strong statement. It is to be remembered that he lives in a land where, for some reason, the most gifted writers sometimes fail to mellow and sweeten as they grow older ; where they are more apt to become, like Carlyle and Ruskin, the victims of their own past attitude and deeds, and at last can only reëcho their earlier phrases in a higher and higher key till they end in a cry of despair. Even a man of Mr. Arnold's caliber may not be wholly safe from such dangers. It is well for him to use, for once

in his life, a phrase so strong as "hideousness and *ennui*," if he really means it ; but, when a man has once committed himself to such a statement as that, there is danger lest it become his master ; when we meet it again and again in successive essays (pp. 79, 168, 227, etc.), it gradually recalls Carlyle's everlasting "respectability that keeps a gig," although that was, after all, a much kindlier condemnation. No one can compare "Mixed Essays" with "Essays in Criticism" and not see that, with increase of power, there has hardly been a corresponding increase of that sweetness which the author of both volumes has long represented to so many minds. Yet the purely literary portion of this later work is as delightful as ever, its knowledge as large, its criticism as delicate, its touch as sure. Mr. Arnold still wields the polished sword of Saladin, and it is hardly fair to complain if he brings from rougher contests the added ornament of some notches on the blade.

III.

So profoundly in earnest has been the life of Mr. Gladstone* that his most purely literary work carries with it the full force of his statesmanlike energy, as his speeches on the driest themes always revealed something of his literary tastes. In his essays there is a sweeping and stately amplification that may sometimes remind the reader of Coleridge and De Quincey, but that there is always, behind all, more method and a clearer end. It is by this amplification alone that we recognize him as an older man than Matthew Arnold, and as having formed his style before it was the habit to shorten one's sword. His practice of numbering paragraphs, too, gives a serious and old-fashioned look to his pages ; and tends to deter the careless reader, who shrinks from being reminded, as on a railway, of the precise distance from either terminus. But there is absolutely no other hint of advancing years in these pages. Though he is approaching seventy, Mr. Gladstone's manner is for ever young. The latest essays will be generally accounted the best ; and "Kin beyond Sea" and "The Sixteenth Century arraigned before the Nineteenth," though both papers were published only last year, rank as his very best in vigor of thought and felicity of statement.

Mr. Gladstone has wisely omitted from these volumes those essays, or parts of essays, consisting mainly "of matter contested be-

* *Gleanings of Past Years, 1844-'78.* By the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M. P. New York : Charles Scribner's Sons. 4 vols.

tween political parties" (iv., 341). But he has honorably abstained from modifying or explaining away passages that seem inconsistent with one another, or which compliment political opponents whom he might not now as cordially praise. His essay on "Germany, France, and England," first published in 1870, quotes something that "Mr. Disraeli honorably to himself" said in favor of Mr. Gladstone's own policy (iv., 199). And the assumption at the end of the same paper, "If we no longer dream of foreign acquisitions" (iv., 256), reads strangely in view of the assertion, made seven years later, "It is not to be denied that the territorial appetite has within the last quarter of a century revived among us with an abnormal vigor" (iv., 342). Still, the two statements are not irreconcilable, and an uneasy, self-critical nature might have been tempted, perhaps unsuccessfully, to harmonize them. As a matter of fact, the author was thinking, in the first essay, of his own administration; and, in the second, of the longer period of which it formed a part.

When it is remembered that one of the commonest charges against Mr. Gladstone, when in office, was that of being too thin-skinned and too easily goaded into self-justification, it is pleasant to see in how calm and dignified a spirit this book is edited. There is nowhere visible in the notes a trace of personal sensitiveness, even in that most fatal form, the bluff profession of indifference to censure. Those who happened to be in England at the time when "Kin beyond Sea" was published, and who remember the howl of indignation which greeted its predictions as to the future prosperity of the United States in competition with England, will note with admiration that these assaults of critics are left absolutely unmentioned in reprinting the article. Many Liberals did not hesitate to say that their favorite statesman had dealt a fatal blow to his own influence, and Lord Beaconsfield was quoted as having uttered words of very ungenerous triumph. Less than a year has passed; the rapid current of events has already so developed American trade with England as to make Mr. Gladstone's predictions seem far less wild and unpatriotic than they were first held to be; and he now simply reprints them, without exultation and without apology.

While writing in the periodical which had the honor first to publish that remarkable essay, it is hardly needful to praise the clearness and general correctness of its analysis of American affairs—a correctness which no Englishman, except perhaps Mr. Bright, has equaled. Nor is it needful to dwell on the service rendered by

that paper in pointing out to Americans the true theory of the British Government, and especially the real tenure by which "constitutional kingship" now holds its own. Americans may smile as they read the glowing paragraph in which Mr. Gladstone hints the hope that misguided France may yet abandon the republic (i., 228), and implies it as an open question whether the New World will not yet need a king (i., 228); we may wonder that he should see the European current as setting that way (i., 229), when it seems to us to set the other. But the hearty sincerity of his attitude, and the delicate analysis shown in his statement, must help Americans to understand why Englishmen, as a rule, seem to like a monarchy, a thing really almost as hard as to explain to Englishmen like Mr. Gladstone why Americans prefer a republic. Yet one would suppose that, even on his own showing, the cis-Atlantic preference might be explainable, for no one has drawn a more masterly sketch than his of the almost hopeless barrier of moral isolation which now inevitably surrounds English royalty: "To be served by all is dangerous; to be contradicted by none is worse. Taking into view the immense increase in the appliances of material ease and luxury, the general result is that in the private and domestic sphere a royal will enjoys at this epoch, more nearly than in any past generation, the privileges of a kind of omnipotence. At the same time, the principal burden of care and all responsibility for acts of administration, and for the state of the country, is transferred to the heads of others, and even the voice of the lightest criticism is rarely heard" (i., 48).

It is a misfortune to the American reader that some of these papers bear so closely upon matters especially English, as the Established Church and the County Franchise, that they may create some indifference, at first sight, in his mind. Yet even these questions involve beneath their details some of the very principles with which we on this side of the water have to deal; and this languid reader may be very sure that the statesman who could so handle the driest array of statistics as to charm a bored or hostile Parliament into rapt attention, can still throw attractiveness around what are, after all, living themes. Even his prejudices and abstractions have an interest; and though one sometimes wishes that his fine-drawn visions of an aristocratic and hierarchical world could sometimes be struck through by a single powerful stroke like those of Matthew Arnold's lecture on "Equality," yet it is something to be held, through four volumes, in the grasp of an intellect

so trained, and a conscience so lofty. And certainly no one can deny the exhibition of vigor in its highest form to that extraordinary paper, the "Letter to the Earl of Aberdeen," in 1851, in which Mr. Gladstone claimed the interference of the British Government in behalf of thirty thousand men held as political prisoners by the Neapolitan Bourbons. This pamphlet passed through eleven editions in a single year, and was forwarded by Lord Palmerston to all the British ministers on the Continent of Europe. It appears here (iv., 1), with other papers on the same subject; and it is to be hoped that they have not lost their interest, as some of Sydney Smith's writings are said to have lost theirs, from having "done their work so well that their giants are not merely slain, but forgotten."

IV.

A book on nature may be relied upon to attract readers, just as all eyes are drawn to a man who comes into any public place with a fowling-piece on his shoulder, or a string of fish in his hand. The public is easily pleased with such a work; if it only contains the results of personal observation, all literary defects are readily excused, and even egotism becomes a sort of merit. It is pleasant to feel the positive charm of directness and simplicity in a book like "Wild Life in a Southern County,"* and it is impossible not to perceive that in this respect "Locusts and Wild Honey" is at some disadvantage. The English book is written by a man who has known what it is to have old folios and quartos on his bookcase (p. 141); and yet there is not a wordy or ambitious phrase from beginning to end; an immense wealth of natural observation is given in a way that any rustic hunter or fisherman can understand. But the style of Mr. Burroughs is in the transition state from that of the naturalist to that of the literary idealist; and, while giving us poetic touches such as the Englishman scarcely attempts, the American lacks the charm of an even execution and a discriminating taste. The descriptions of nature in "Wild Life" are like the processes of Nature herself, who is wonderfully clear and sweet amid all the facts of change and decay. In the work of Mr. Burroughs there is far more cause for complaint. True, he does not here offend good taste so seriously as in some of his earlier books—as, for instance, in that very unpleasant passage in "Winter Sun-

* Wild Life in a Southern County. Boston: Roberts Brothers.

Locusts and Wild Honey. By John Burroughs. Boston: Houghton, Osgood & Co.

shine" (p. 197); still it is needlessly annoying to be brought down from some really graceful and airy fancy to such phrases as "boss-clouds" ("Locusts," etc., p. 96), or "the clerk of the weather has a sour stomach" (p. 88). It costs the English observer no effort to avoid such blemishes, and he describes the homeliest incidents of farm-life without needing to employ a coarse word.

It is necessary to refer to these qualities of style in Mr. Burroughs, because they do not seem accidental, but rather the working out of a system. The theory still pervades his books that literary smoothness or finish are not merely dangerous qualities—which is quite true—but that they are dastardly, and imply some fatal weakness. I knew a young girl who had lived in a far Western State of the Union, and who, on first coming to the Atlantic cities, declared that the men she met in society did not seem to her like men, they made so little noise, and were so neatly dressed. Mr. Burroughs betrays some such solicitude, and his theories, if legitimately carried out, would make Ossian the chief of poets. If he praises Shakespeare, it is as showing "the grit and virility of the primitive bard" (p. 178), and in some of his earlier writings he refers to the Greek poets as "the shaggy old bards"; whereas the characterization of Shakespeare as a wild, irregular genius was protested against, long since, by Charles Lamb, and has never reappeared in literature; and the laws of Greek verse were so strict that the roughest passage in *Æschylus* was composed under restraints far severer than controlled Longfellow's smoothest line. Thoreau knew the Greeks better than Mr. Burroughs, and it was for the "refinement" and "perfection" of their work that he praised them, not for shaggy strength. Even when Mr. Burroughs applies the same theory to the study of nature, he does not succeed much better. "I have thought," he says, "that all forms of life in the Old World were marked by greater prominence of type, or stronger characteristic and fundamental qualities than with us—coarser and more hairy and virile, and therefore more powerful and lasting" (p. 153). But the fortunes of the now extinct hairy mammoth hardly justify this *therefore*; and in literature, as in nature, the finer types, not the ruder, survive. It is not the test of strength in a writer that he should use the word "virility" a great many times, but that his vigor should show itself, even through a careful literary execution, like a powerful character beneath refined manners, or the concentrated force of an army beneath the subdued proprieties of its drill. Nature itself—an authority to which Mr. Bur-

roughs, as her faithful disciple, must yield—confirms this assertion at every point. “In the softest tree or the airiest waterfall, the fundamental lines are as lithe and muscular as the crouching haunches of a leopard.”

But for all Mr. Burroughs's occasional mannerisms and willfulness, it is a pleasure to follow him where he is familiar, observing the bees on the farm, the trout in the forest brook, or the thrushes in the wood. He is on our own ground, deals with cis-Atlantic themes, and every novel fact he gives is something reclaimed from the unexplored regions of our own out-door life. He sometimes falls into an inadvertence in language, as when he speaks of the “hylas” instead of the “hyla” (p. 54), using the pronoun “him” afterward, so that he plainly is not employing the name in the plural. It seems unlikely that any bird should be called “*la siffleur*” (p. 223) instead of “*le siffleur*,” in Canada; and we should surely read “*La Grande Brûlure*” instead of “*La Grand Brûlure*” (pp. 226, 244). It is possible to criticise such extreme colloquialisms as “she was to the ground before the cicada was” (p. 40). But Mr. Burroughs is too painstaking an observer to be often caught tripping in his facts, and, though his thoughts often take a flavor from Emerson or Thoreau, he has studied well in their school, and his observations are his own.

If the author of “Wild Life” does not report to us the affairs of our own woods and meadows, he gives the charming and congenial atmosphere of English rural scenes. It affords a quaint flavor to have him use here and there familiarly and without quotation-marks many rustic words, for which we must go to the dictionary—such words as *coombe* (p. 54), *bennet* (p. 11, etc.), *haulier* (p. 107), *sarsenstone* (p. 149), *ash-stole* (p. 208), *eyot* (p. 313). It is interesting to come upon what have always seemed local American phrases, and to learn where and how they are used in England; thus the “flake,” which he defines as “a frame of light wood, used after the manner of a hurdle” (p. 63), reappears in those wooden frames called “fish-flakes” along the New England shore. It is interesting to notice the same complaints of decreasing villages (p. 67) in some parts of Old England as in some parts of New England; to find that houses where King Charles slept are there as omnipresent (p. 76) as those where Washington slept in America; to have descriptions of old-fashioned cottages built around their chimneys (p. 80) like the old cottages in Massachusetts and Rhode Island;

and to find that there, as here, the health of villages has really improved in these days (p. 111), instead of declining. It is curious to be told (p. 123) that wine is rapidly supplanting ale among English farmers of the better class, while here it is plain that lager-beer is taking the place of wine and spirits. One reads with envy of the attention still given to bell-ringing as a fine art in country parishes (p. 90), while among us that graceful employment has never found a foothold, because chimes of bells are so rare. Some of his observations on nature, although they bear the marks of careful accuracy, seem quite unlike the results of American observation ; thus I have tried in vain to verify his statement that ants avoid placing their nests where people walk, and put them only at the edges of the garden-paths (p. 50). Is it a bit of covert satire in Nature that ants in a republican country grow indifferent to being trampled upon ? But there are few points where even this amount of criticism can be made ; and when our anonymous Englishman draws a general reflection it is quite as good as anything offered by Mr. Burroughs. What can be prettier than when, in watching the busy and joyous goldfinches, he decides that "a sunshiny day must be like a month to them" (p. 156) ; or what can be wiser than when he says, "Often in striving to get the most value from our time it slips from us, as the reality did from the dog that greedily grasped the shadow" (p. 185) ; or more inspiring and suggestive than when he concludes, after studying the manner in which young cuckoos are reared by robins, "Higher sentiments than those usually attributed to the birds and beasts of the field may, I think, be traced in some of their actions" ? (p. 291). The thoughts of so kindly and modest an observer may well recall us with delight to that wholesome rural side of English life, always so attractive to an American, and more satisfying in these days than the strife of English politics or the new-born imperialism of Lord Beaconsfield.

THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON.